

The invention in which an exclusive right is claimed is defined by the following:

1. A method for increasing a speed with which at least a portion of an online content stored at a first location is displayed to a user at a second location connected in communication with the first location over a network, comprising the steps of:

(a) storing data for said at least the portion of the online content as part of a data cache on a physical medium that includes data for a plurality of specified online content sources;

(b) distributing the physical medium on which is stored the data cache for the plurality of specified online content sources to the user; and

(c) when the user at the second location has connected to the first location and has selectively chosen to display the online content, displaying the online content to the user with the data for said at least the portion of the online content included in the data cache, said online content being displayed to the user substantially faster using the data that were stored in the data cache on the physical medium than if all data for the online content were instead transferred over the network from the first location to the second location.

2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

(a) encrypting data for the plurality of online content sources stored in the data cache of the physical medium prior to the step of distributing; and

(b) decrypting the data for said at least the portion of the online content prior to the step of displaying the online content to the user.

3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

(a) compressing data for the plurality of online content sources that are stored in the data cache of the physical medium prior to the step of distributing; and

(b) decompressing the data for said at least the portion of the online content prior to the step of displaying the online content to the user.

4. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
 - (a) providing a software program enabling the user to access the data cache stored on the physical medium;
 - (b) determining a storage date of the data for said at least the portion of the online content included in the data cache, using the software program; and
 - (c) selectively accessing the data for said at least the portion of the online content included in the data cache prior to the step of displaying the online content to the user, only if the storage date of said data is the same as a date for the online content at the first location; and if not,
 - (d) transferring all of the data for the online content from the first location to the second location, to display the online content to the user.

5. The method of Claim 4, further comprising the step of enabling the software program to interface with a browser in which the online content is displayed, said software program controlling whether data used for displaying the online content is received from the first location or obtained from the data cache.

6. The method of Claim 4, further comprising the step of enabling the software program to collect usage information regarding online content sources selected by the user for display, for transmission over the network to a service program running at a third location, said usage information being employed by the service to determine a new plurality of specified web sites for which data will be stored in a data cache on another physical medium, for subsequent distribution to the user.

7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of periodically distributing to the user another physical medium on which an updated data cache is stored for a new plurality of specified online content sources.

8. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of selecting the specified online content sources based upon a class of which the user is a member, so that the specified online content sources for which the data cache is provided on the physical medium are likely to be of interest to and selected for display by members of said class to whom the physical medium is distributed.

9. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of updating the data cache with new data for the specific online content sources, said new data being received over the network from a third location, said step of updating occurring as a background task that is executed at a time when other data are not being transferred over the network to the second location.

10. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

- (a) responding to the user requesting display of the online content by parsing the data stored in the data cache for the online content to identify uniform resource locators (URLs) referenced therein;
- (b) requesting a timestamp for said URLs over the network from a service program that is executing at a third location;
- (c) responding to a reply received from the service program that indicates whether the data cache for the online content is current for each URL, by obtaining data for the URL from the data cache if the data for the URL is current in the data cache; and otherwise,
- (d) obtaining the data for the URL over the network.

11. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

- (a) transmitting a uniform resource locator (URL), for the online content selected by a user for display, over the network to a service program being executed at a third location;
- (b) creating a prefetch list of other URLs referenced on the online content;
- (c) transmitting the prefetch list from the third location to the second location; and
- (d) preloading data conveyed over the network into a prefetch cache at the second location, for at least one URL in the prefetch list, so that the data for said at least one URL is already available in the prefetch cache at the second location and can more rapidly be displayed to the user if said at least one URL is selected for display by the user from within the online content.

12. A method for enabling subscribers to a service to more rapidly display each of a plurality of specified online content sources, comprising the steps of:

- (a) periodically collecting and storing data for each of the plurality of specified online content sources on a storage at a data center;
- (b) replicating the data for the plurality of specified online content sources that are stored in the storage as a data cache stored on a plurality of distributable physical storage media;
- (c) distributing a physical storage medium on which the data cache is stored, to each subscriber of the service;
- (d) enabling each subscriber to install a proxy program that serves as an interface between the data cache that was received on the physical storage medium, a network over which online content sources are accessed, and a browser program with which online content sources are displayed to the subscriber; and
- (e) for an online content that is being selectively accessed over the network by a subscriber, using any data for said online content that are included in the data cache received on the physical storage medium to speed the display of the online content with the browser program, by avoiding the need to transfer the data over the network from a site at which the online content is being accessed.

13. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of collecting subscriber usage data using the proxy program, said subscriber usage data being transferred over the network to the data center to determine online content sources that should be included in the plurality of selected online content sources for which data will be collected in the future, for distribution to the subscribers, said usage data indicating online content sources that are more frequently selected by the subscribers for display with the browser program.

14. The method of Claim 13, further comprising the step of employing the usage data in determining, for each of a plurality of different classes of subscribers, online content sources that are included in the plurality of specific online content sources for which data will be collected for distribution on the physical storage media to members of each class of subscribers, the specific online content sources for each class of subscribers including data for online content sources that are more frequently selected by members of that class for display with the browser program.

15. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of publishing data cache updates to a subscriber over the network as a background task, at times when the subscriber is not currently receiving other data over the network, said data cache updates replacing expired data in the data cache stored on the physical medium that was previously distributed to the subscriber.

16. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of using the proxy program to determine whether the data included in the data cache distributed on the physical medium for a uniform resource locator (URL) on an online content being accessed by a subscriber are current, by communicating with the data center over the network to validate said data.

17. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the steps of:

- (a) using the proxy program to transmit to the data center a uniform resource locator (URL) of an online content that is being accessed by a subscriber;
- (b) at the data center, identifying URLs that are included in the online content being accessed and are likely to be accessed by the subscriber, to produce a prefetch list;
- (c) transmitting the prefetch list from the data center to the subscriber; and
- (d) in the background, using the proxy program to load data into a prefetch cache, for the URLs that are included in the prefetch list, so that a URL for which data have thus been cached, is rapidly displayed with the browser program if selected for display by the subscriber.

18. A physically distributable memory medium on which is stored a machine readable data cache, said data cache including data for a plurality of specific online content sources for use in increasing a speed with which the specific online content sources are displayed to a user by a browser program when one of the specific online content sources is selectively accessed over a network by the user, data for said specific online content from the data cache being used to display the online content in the browser program instead of data transferred from a site of the online content over the network.

19. The physically distributable memory medium of Claim 18, further comprising machine readable instructions, which when executed by a computing device, cause the computing device to employ the data cache for displaying one of the specific online content sources instead of using data transferred over a network.

20. The physically distributable memory medium of Claim 19, wherein the machine readable instructions, when executed by the computing device, further cause the computing device to transmit usage information to a remote site, said usage information indicating each online content accessed by a user over the network and being used in determining the specific online content sources for which data should subsequently be collected and distributed on another distributable memory medium.

21. The physically distributable memory medium of Claim 19, wherein the machine readable instructions, when executed by a computing device, further cause the computing device to obtain from a remote site a prefetch list of uniform resource locators (URLs) referenced in an online content being accessed by a user, and then load data for the URLs in the prefetch list into a prefetch cache as a background task, so that the data loaded into the prefetch cache are available for immediate display if a user selects one of the URLs in the online content that is in the prefetch list for display.

22. The physically distributable memory medium of Claim 18, wherein the data in the data cache stored thereon is encrypted.

23. The physically distributable memory medium of Claim 18, wherein the data in the data cache stored thereon is compressed.

24. A method for enabling data referenced by a uniform reference locator (URL) included in a selected online content to be more rapidly displayed when chosen for display by a user, comprising the steps of:

(a) sending an identification of the selected online content over a network to a service operating at a remote site, said service identifying one or more URLs in the selected online content that are likely to be subsequently selected by the user for display of the data referenced thereby, and including said one or more URLs in a prefetch list;

(b) transmitting the prefetch list over the network from the service to a computing device of the user that is being employed by the user to display the selected online content; and

(c) in a background task, loading data referenced by the URLs in the prefetch list into a prefetch cache, so that the data in the prefetch cache are immediately available for use by the computing device in displaying the data, if a URL in the selected online content that is also in the prefetch list is chosen for display by the user.

25. A system for enabling an online content being accessed at a first location to be more rapidly displayed to a user disposed at a second location, comprising:

- (a) a processor;
- (b) a physically distributed memory medium on which is stored a data cache that includes data for a plurality of selected online content sources, said physically distributed memory medium being coupled in communication with the processor so that the data cache stored on the physically distributed memory medium is accessible by the processor;
- (c) a network interface that couples the processor in communication with a network;
- (d) an output device for displaying output to the user using data for an online content, said online content having been selected by a user over the network; and
- (e) a memory in which are stored a plurality of machine instructions, said memory being coupled to the processor, said plurality of machine instructions, when executed by the processor, causing the processor to more rapidly display an online content selected by the user using the data in the data cache, if data for the online content selected by the user are included in the data cache stored on the physically distributed memory medium, so that the data for the online content need not be transferred over the network through the network interface.

26. The system of Claim 25, wherein at least a portion of the machine instructions comprise a proxy program that is included on the physically distributed memory medium and is loaded into the memory for execution by the processor, said proxy program causing the processor to collect usage data identifying online content sources that are selected by a user for display, and then causing the processor to transmit the usage data to a data center for use in determining the selected online content sources for which data will subsequently be collected and stored on other physically distributed memory media by the data center.

27. The system of Claim 26, wherein the proxy program further causes the processor to transmit an identifier for an online content that is being displayed, over the network to the data center, and to employ a prefetch list of uniform resource locators (URLs) referenced in the online content received from the data center to load data referenced by the URLs into a prefetch cache stored in the memory, so that data for a URL included in the prefetch list is immediately displayed on the output device by the processor using the data in the prefetch cache for the URL, if the URL is selected for display by a user.

28. A system for enabling data indicated by a uniform resource locator (URL) included in an online content being accessed at a first location to be more rapidly displayed to a user disposed at a second location that is coupled to the first location over a network, comprising:

- (a) a processor;
- (b) a network interface that couples the processor in communication with a network;
- (c) an output device for displaying an online content selected by a user over the network; and
- (d) a memory in which are stored a plurality of machine instructions, said memory being coupled to the processor, said plurality of machine instructions, when executed by the processor, causing the processor to transmit an identifier for an online content that is being displayed over the network to a data center, and to employ a prefetch list of uniform resource locators (URLs) referenced in the online content received from the data center to load data referenced by the URLs into a prefetch cache stored in the memory, so that data for any URL included in the prefetch list is immediately displayed on the output device by the processor using the data in the prefetch cache for the URL, if the URL is selected for display by a user.